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(71) Applicant: The BOC Group, Inc.
85 Chestnut Ridge Road
Montvale, New Jersey 07645(US)

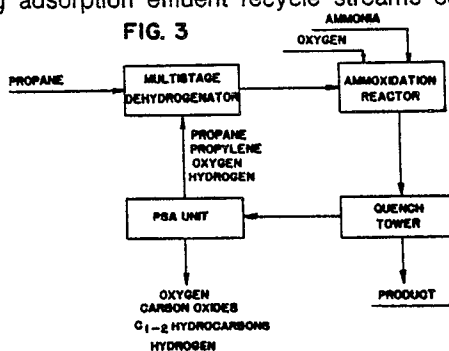
(72) Inventor: Ramachandran, Ramakrishnan

232 Hillside Avenue
Allendale New Jersey 07401(US)
Inventor: MacLean, Donald L.
RD Box 102
Annandale New Jersey 08801(US)
Inventor: Satchell, Donald P., Jr.
10 Lavina Court
Summit New Jersey 07901(US)

(74) Representative: Wickham, Michael et al
c/o Patent and Trademark Department The
BOC Group plc Chertsey Road
Windlesham Surrey GU20 6HJ(GB)

(54) Process for the production of nitriles and oxides.

(57) An improved process is provided for the production of nitriles and oxides from hydrocarbons by reaction with oxygen, air or oxygen-enriched air, and ammonia where a nitrile is desired, in the presence of a suitable catalyst. An alkane, eg propane, is converted to an alkene in a multistage dehydrogenator. A stream containing alkene is withdrawn from a reactor in the dehydrogenator other than the first and the last reactor and introduced into an ammoxidation/oxidation reactor. The product is recovered in a conventional quench tower. The gaseous effluent from the quench tower is treated in a pressure swing adsorption unit to form a gas stream containing the unreacted alkane and alkene as well as a minor amount of oxygen. The gas stream, which may or may not contain hydrogen depending on the adsorbent in the pressure swing adsorption unit, is introduced into the reactor in the dehydrogenator following that from which the product stream was withdrawn. The effluent from the last reactor in the dehydrogenator is introduced into: the first reactor; an intermediate reactor wherein the alkene concentration closely approximates the effluent or the ammoxidation/oxidation reactor. The process operates particularly efficient when utilizing oxygen-enriched air in the reactor feed. A particularly preferred pressure swing adsorption system for use in the subject process comprises two parallel pressure swing adsorption units containing different adsorbents such that the gas stream formed in one contains all of the hydrogen in the gas phase from the quench tower. The feed to the pressure swing adsorption units is divided disproportionately so that the combined pressure swing adsorption effluent recycle streams contain the optimum concentration of hydrogen for the dehydrogenator.



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PROCESS FOR PRODUCTION OF NITRILES AND OXIDES

The present invention relates to a process for producing nitriles and oxides from alkanes, an oxygen-containing gas and ammonia in the presence of a suitable catalyst under conditions which achieve high efficiency and selectivity toward the desired product.

5 The production of nitriles and oxides by ammoxidation and oxidation, respectively, of an appropriate alkene in the presence of a suitable catalyst is well known. The production of acrylonitrile, for example, from a gaseous feed of propylene, ammonia and air is described by Bruce E Gates et al in Chemistry of Catalytic Processes, McGraw-Hill (1979) pp 380-384.

10 The feed is sent to an ammoxidation reactor where, in the presence of a suitable catalyst, acrylonitrile is produced along with lesser amounts of other nitrogen-containing compounds. The effluent from the ammoxidation reaction is quenched with water and the desired products are obtained in the liquid phase. The gas phase by-products, typically oxygen, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen and unreacted hydrocarbon, are combined with natural gas and sent to a boiler for combustion as disclosed, for example, in Yoshino et al, US Patent 3,591,620 and Callahan et al, US Patent No 4,335,056.

15 More recently, Khoobiar et al, in US Patent 4,609,502 disclosed a cyclic process for producing acrylonitrile using propane as a starting material which is initially dehydrogenated catalytically in the presence of steam to form propylene. This is in contrast to most conventional dehydrogenation processes which avoid steam primarily due to the costs involved. After ammoxidation, the effluent is quenched, the desired product removed, and the off gases, including propylene and propane, are sent to an oxidation reactor to remove oxygen by selective reaction with hydrogen to form water vapor. The gas mixture exiting
20 the selective oxidation reactor ('oxidator') includes substantial amounts of methane, ethane and ethylene, which are by-products of dehydrogenation, and unreacted propylene in addition to carbon oxides. As an option, this gas mixture is split and a portion is sent to a separator which removes only carbon dioxide. A portion of the effluent from the separator is purged to remove light hydrocarbons. The non-purged stream is mixed with the remainder of the oxidator effluent, fresh propane and steam, if necessary, sent to the
25 dehydrogenator where the propane is converted to propylene. Another option is to cool and liquify the C₃ hydrocarbons therefrom and then vaporize them prior to recycle.

The aforementioned process suffers from several disadvantages. For example, there is no practical way selectively to remove by-products of propane dehydrogenation, such as methane, ethane, ethylene and the like, thereby preventing their accumulation in the system other than by removing them in a purge stream.
30 The removal of these gases in a purge stream will result in a loss of the circulating propane and propylene, thus causing a significant decrease in the yield of propylene. As mentioned above, propane and propylene can be recovered from the stream prior to venting. This requires additional refrigeration apparatus to cool and liquefy the propylene and propane. The separated C₃ hydrocarbons must be vaporized prior to recycle. These operations add to the capital costs and power requirements of the process.

35 Another disadvantage of the Khoobiar et al process stems from the use of the selective oxidation reactor to treat the gaseous effluent from the quencher. The gases exiting the quencher are at ambient temperature and must be heated prior to introduction into the oxidation reactor in order to promote oxygen removal. Because there is a significant amount of oxygen in the quencher effluent, the heat of reaction generated in the oxidation reactor can result in excessive temperatures in the system. There are three
40 options to alleviate this problem. First, the amount of oxygen entering the oxidation reactor can be reduced by other means. Second, multiple reactors can be utilized with a cooling means between each pair of reactors. Third, a portion of the effluent from the reactor is passed through a cooling means and recycled to the feed to reduce the internal temperature of the reactor. One of these measures is attractive from the viewpoint of cost and efficiency.

45 The oxidation reactor in the Khoobiar et al process is operated with oxidation catalysts such as noble metals (eg platinum). Olefins and carbon monoxide, which are generated in the dehydrogenation reactor, are known to deactivate these catalysts, as disclosed in Catalytic Processes and Proven Catalysts, Charles L Thomas, Academic Press (1970) pp 118-119. Accordingly, multiple oxidation reactors must be used to allow for frequent regeneration of the catalyst which represents yet another addition to production costs (US
50 Patent No 4,609,502, column 4, lines 51-56).

It is therefore apparent that the industry is still searching for a cost effective process of converting hydrocarbons into nitriles or oxides. Applicants have invented a process which is cost effective and in which the disadvantages of the aforementioned systems are substantially reduced or eliminated. Moreover, in comparison to conventional processes, the thermal requirements of Applicants' process are markedly reduced.

According to the present invention, there is provided a process for the production of nitriles and oxides comprising the steps of:

- (a) forming an alkene from a gaseous alkane by passage through a catalytic dehydrogenator comprising a series of at least three discrete catalytic reactors, wherein a gaseous stream containing said alkene, hydrogen and unreacted alkane is withdrawn from a reactor intermediate the first and last of said reactors, the gaseous flow between said reactors, upto and including the reactor from which the said stream is withdrawn, is passed through a heating means to raise the temperature thereof, and the catalyst in the dehydrogenator is passed through all of said reactors, regenerated and recycled to the first reactor;
- (b) reacting alkene in said gaseous stream with oxygen and, optionally, ammonia in the presence of a suitable catalyst to produce a gaseous effluent containing said nitrile or oxide;
- (c) quenching said effluent in a liquid to form a liquid phase containing said nitrile or oxide and a gaseous phase;
- (d) recovering said nitrile or oxide from the liquid phase;
- (e) separating the gaseous phase under pressure by pressure swing adsorption and thereby forming a resulting separated stream of gas comprising unreacted alkane, alkene, and a minor amount of oxygen;
- (f) introducing said resulting separated gaseous stream into the reactor(s) in said dehydrogenator which follow in sequence the reactor from which the product stream was withdrawn, thereby removing substantially all of the oxygen contained in said stream; and
- (g) introducing the effluent from said last reactor into said first reactor; a reactor other than said first reactor wherein the concentration of the alkene is approximately the same as that of said effluent; or the reaction of step (b).

The invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 illustrates in a block diagram a present conventional process of producing acrylonitrile from propylene.

Figure 2 illustrates in a block diagram a prior art process of producing acrylonitrile utilizing a recycle step.

Figure 3 illustrates in a block diagram the process of the invention for producing acrylonitrile.

Figure 4 illustrates in a block diagram detail of the dehydrogenator utilized in the process of this invention.

The process of this invention is applicable to the synthesis of nitriles and oxides. In each instance, an alkene, which has been formed by the dehydrogenation of the corresponding alkane, is reacted with an oxygen-containing gas comprising pure oxygen, air, or a gas-enriched in oxygen relative to air in the presence of a suitable catalyst. The term "suitable catalyst" indicates a catalyst that will catalyse the production of the desired product under the conditions utilized in the reactor. In the event an oxide, eg ethylene oxide, is desired, an oxidation catalyst is utilized. On the other hand, to form a nitrile, the feed to the reactor additionally includes ammonia and the catalyst is an ammoxidation catalyst. These catalysts and their use are conventional and well known to one of ordinary skill in the art.

Illustrative of products, and their respective starting gaseous alkanes, which can be advantageously produced by the method of this invention are acrylonitrile from propane, methacrylonitrile from isobutane, ethylene oxide from ethane and the like. In the interest of brevity, the subject process will be described with reference to the production of acrylonitrile from propane, but is in no way intended to be limited thereto.

Turning to the drawings, a process currently utilized commercially to produce acrylonitrile is illustrated in Figure 1. Propylene, ammonia and air are fed into a conventional reactor containing a suitable ammoxidation catalyst. The reactor may be of any conventional fixed or fluidized bed design, typically the latter. Such processes, which do not involve a recycle step, utilize air or oxygen-enriched air in the reactor feed, although air is normally used for reasons of economy. The oxygen concentration in the reactor feed is not considered to be critical in regard to the accumulation of other gases, primarily nitrogen, in the system due to the lack of recycle. Those skilled in the art are aware that the oxygen content in the feed of such a process must be regulated in regard to other aspects of the process.

The reactor product gases are cooled in a heat exchanger, not shown, to form steam and then passed to a water quench column or tower to dissolve the products, ie acrylonitrile, acetonitrile, acrolein and hydrogen cyanide, as well as unreacted ammonia. The acrylonitrile is subsequently recovered from the aqueous solution by conventional methods. The off-gases from the quench tower are combined with natural gas and combusted in a boiler to generate steam. The off-gases of the boiler are vented. Since there is no recycle provided in such a process, the yield of acrylonitrile realized is directly related to the efficiency of

the reactor.

Figure 2 illustrates the cyclic process for producing acrylonitrile disclosed in Khoobiar et al US Patent No 4,609,502. In this process, propane and steam are fed into a dehydrogenator to form propylene which is then mixed with pure oxygen and ammonia and fed into an ammoxidation reactor such as described in Figure 1. The product is fed to an aqueous quench tower as in Figure 1 and the products withdrawn in solution. The gaseous take-off from the quench tower, typically containing oxygen, hydrogen, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, methane, ethane, ethylene, propane and propylene, is fed to a selective oxidation reactor. As previously indicated, it is generally essential for the efficient operation of such a reactor to heat the gas mixture prior to introduction therein.

A portion of the off-gas from the oxidation reactor is passed to a separator to remove carbon oxides by an undisclosed mechanism. A portion of the separator effluent, which contains light hydrocarbons and hydrogen, is purged, treated to remove propane and propylene and discarded, thereby preventing build-up of by-products in the system. The propane and propylene are combined with the remainder of the oxidator effluent and the remainder of the separator effluent and recycled to the dehydrogenator. It is, of course, necessary for the oxidator to be effective in removing all oxygen from the quench tower effluent to prevent significant loss of effectiveness of the dehydrogenator. It is also necessary for the oxygen feed to be pure oxygen because the use of air or oxygen-enriched air would produce a rapid accumulation of nitrogen in the system. This would, in turn, require the purging of a larger portion of the recycle stream with resulting loss of efficiency.

The process of the present invention is illustrated in Figure 3. The present process provides the efficiency of recycle afforded by the process illustrated in Figure 2, yet does not require the capital cost of oxidation units, does not have a loss of efficiency through a purge stream and does not lose effectiveness of the dehydrogenation catalyst due to oxygen in the recycle stream thereto. In addition, unexpectedly, the process of the present invention can advantageously and efficiently utilize air and oxygen-enriched air as a feed to the ammoxidation/oxidation reactor.

Referring to Figure 3, propane is fed into the multi-stage dehydrogenator where it is converted to propylene. For increased catalyst life, it is preferred to introduce a hydrogen-containing gas into the dehydrogenator with the propane feed. The dehydrogenator will be discussed in detail below. The catalyst utilized in the dehydrogenator can be any conventional dehydrogenation catalyst, preferably one or more Group VIII noble metals such as platinum on an alumina support. The effluent product stream from the dehydrogenator comprising unreacted propane, propylene and hydrogen, is fed into a conventional ammoxidation/oxidation reactor along with pure oxygen, air or, preferably, oxygen-enriched air and ammonia.

The ammoxidation/oxidation reactor utilized in the present process is conventional and may employ either a fixed or fluidized catalyst bed. A typical example of an ammoxidation reactor is disclosed in Angstadt et al, US Patent No 4,070,393 and Gates et al, *ibid*, pp 381-383, each incorporated herein by reference. The reactor contains a conventional ammoxidation catalyst, such as bismuth-molybdenum oxide, iron-antimony oxide, uranium-antimony oxide precipitated on silica and the like. Other suitable catalysts are disclosed, for example, in Chemistry of Catalytic Processes, Gates et al, McGraw Hill (1979) pp 349-350, and Yoshino et al, US Patent No 3,591,620, incorporated herein by reference. Additional suitable catalysts are known to those skilled in the art.

The ammoxidation reaction is conducted at a temperature of from about 375° to 550° C, preferably from about 400° to 500° C, at low pressures, typically in the range of from about 3 to 30 psig, preferably from about 5 to 20 psig. The reactants are passed through the reactor at a relatively low velocity, typically in the range of from about 1.75 to 2.2 ft/sec. The oxygen feed may be pure oxygen, air or oxygen-enriched air. In accordance with this invention, oxygen-enriched air preferably contains from about 30 to about 80, most preferably from about 55 to 65, percent by volume of oxygen. Such mixtures may be produced by adjusting the capacity of a conventional oxygen-producing unit, eg a conventional pressure swing adsorption unit, or by mixing pure oxygen with air in the proper proportions. The ratio of oxygen to propylene in the feed is suitably in the range of from about 1.6:1 to 2.4:1 by volume. In the production of a nitrile, the ratio of ammonia to propylene in the feed is suitably in the range of from about 0.7 to 1.2:1 by volume.

The ammoxidation reaction results in the production of a major amount of acrylonitrile and minor amounts of acrolein, hydrogen cyanide, acetonitrile, carbon oxides and nitrogen, when present in the feed, as well as unreacted oxygen, propylene and propane. This gaseous mixture is quenched or scrubbed with a liquid, such as water, to dissolve the water-soluble compounds for subsequent separation and recovery of acrylonitrile, acetonitrile and hydrogen cyanide.

The gas phase effluent from the quench step is introduced into a pressure swing adsorption (PSA) unit. PSA is a well known process for separating the components of a mixture of gases by virtue of the

difference in the degree of adsorption among them on a particular adsorbent retained in a stationary bed. Typically, two or more such beds are operated in a cyclic process comprising adsorption under relatively high pressure and desorption or bed regeneration under low pressure or vacuum. The desired component or components may be obtained during either of these stages. The cycle may contain other steps in addition to the fundamental steps of adsorption and regeneration, and it is commonplace to have two or more adsorbent beds cycled out of phase to assure a pseudo continuous flow of desired product. It is preferred to pass the quench tower effluent through a conventional dryer (not shown) to remove moisture therefrom prior to introducing it into the PSA unit.

It is necessary to raise the pressure of the quench tower effluent in a compressor or other suitable means (not shown) prior to introducing it into the PSA unit. The compressor increases the pressure of the quench tower gaseous effluent to the operating pressure of a PSA unit, typically from about 3 to 50 psig, preferably from about 20 to 40 psig. These ranges may vary to an extent depending on the adsorbent in the PSA unit.

The adsorbent in the PSA unit may be any material recognised in the art which will adsorb propane and propylene to a substantially greater degree than carbon oxides, nitrogen and oxygen, or vice versa. Silica gel or a conventional molecular sieve material, such as 4A zeolite, are preferred adsorbent materials. Silica gel is a particularly preferred material when oxygen-enriched air is utilized as a reactor feed material.

The PSA unit produces a recycle stream and a waste stream. The latter comprises oxygen, carbon oxides, ie carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, nitrogen wherein the feed to the ammoxidation/oxidation reactor is air or oxygen-enriched air, and C₁₋₂ hydrocarbons, ie methane, ethane and ethylene, as well as trace amounts of propane and propylene. The PSA recycle stream contains propane, propylene and a minor quantity of oxygen, typically not more than about 3 percent by volume and a minor quantity of nitrogen. The oxygen content in the recycle stream would ordinarily have an adverse effect on the efficiency of the dehydrogenator. This is readily apparent, for example, from the Khoobiar et al patent discussed above wherein it is required that the effluent from the quench tower be fed into a selective oxidation reactor.

The use of an adsorbent in the PSA unit which will adsorb propane and propylene, such as a silica gel, will cause substantially all of the hydrogen in the quench tower effluent to be removed with the waste stream since the hydrogen is not adsorbed. Thus, in this example the recycle stream is formed by desorbing propane and propylene from the silica gel. Therefore, it is desirable to add an appropriate quantity of hydrogen to the propane/propylene recycle stream before introducing it into a latter stage of the dehydrogenator. If an adsorbent which adsorbs carbon oxides and oxygen, but does not separate hydrogen from propane and propylene such as 4A zeolite molecular sieve, is used as the adsorbent in the PSA unit, the hydrogen will be withdrawn in the recycle stream (which in this case is the unadsorbed gas). Therefore, it will not be necessary to add hydrogen thereto. In fact, it may be necessary to remove some hydrogen therefrom to prevent excessive build-up in the system.

In a preferred embodiment of the subject process, a PSA system comprising parallel PSA units, each containing one of the two types of adsorbers mentioned above, is utilized wherein the feed is disproportionately divided between them so that the combined effluents contain the desired amount of hydrogen. The waste streams from the two units are combined and discarded. The amount of hydrogen required in the recycle feed to the dehydrogenator will vary with the catalyst and can be determined by operation of the system utilizing a given catalyst.

As shown in Figure 4, the present invention utilizes a multistage dehydrogenator which is efficient and which, modified in accordance with the present invention, eliminates the need for the selective oxidation reactor in the Khoobiar et al process. The use of a multistage catalytic reactor is described in the literature, eg Pujado et al in a paper entitled "Catalytic Conversion of LPG" presented at the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, April 6-10, 1986. In such reactors, the catalyst sequentially flows through a series of discrete reactors and is withdrawn at the end for regeneration and recycle. The reactant gas stream likewise flows through the reactors and is withdrawn into a heating means between each of the individual reactors. The dehydrogenator typically operates at a temperature of from about 500° to 800° C, preferably from about 600° to 700° C. The reheating of the reactant stream as it flows through the reactors is especially beneficial for an endothermic reaction such as the conversion of propane to propylene.

In accordance with the present invention, the reactant gas stream does not flow through all reactors, but is withdrawn as a 'product' stream from a reactor intermediate the first and last reactors. Preferably, there are at least four reactors and the product stream is withdrawn from the penultimate reactor. It is beneficial to withdraw the product stream from a latter stage of the dehydrogenator to obtain maximum efficiency therefrom. The reheating of the reactant stream takes place only up to and including the reactor from which the product stream is withdrawn.

If the recycle stream from the PSA unit, which comprises unreacted alkane and alkene and minor amounts of oxygen and nitrogen, if present, is introduced into the reactor following that from which the product is withdrawn, passed therethrough and through subsequent reactors, if any, the low oxygen content thereof can be eliminated without detriment to the system. As is evident from Figure 4, the initial propane feed passes through reactors A through C and is thereafter withdrawn for passage to the ammoxidation reactor, see Figure 3. The recycle stream from the PSA unit is heated, introduced into reactor D and thereafter introduced into the process as described above. The spent catalyst withdrawn from reactor D is passed through a conventional catalyst regenerator and returned to reactor A. In the regenerator, accumulated carbon is burned off of the catalyst after which it is chemically reduced.

In the embodiment illustrated in Figure 4, the effluent from the final reactor of the dehydrogenator is introduced into the initial feed stream. In the event that the feed to one of the intermediate reactors more closely approximates the effluent in regard to the concentration of the alkene than the initial feed, the effluent is introduced into such intermediate reactor. It is further contemplated herein to introduce the effluent from the final reactor directly to the ammoxidation/oxidation reactor if the propylene content thereof is sufficiently high. This might occur, for example, when the PSA effluent passes through two or more reactors of the dehydrogenator.

In the event that the recycle stream from the PSA unit contains no hydrogen, it is combined with a hydrogen-containing stream at elevated temperature and passed through reactor D. The resulting oxygen-free effluent is introduced into the initial feed, an intermediate reactor or the ammoxidation/oxidation reactor. In the event that the effluent is not introduced into the initial feed, it is desirable to add hydrogen to the initial feed to prolong the life of the catalyst. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that a single heater can be utilized in Figure 4 with all streams flowing therethrough. Further, the hydrogen-containing stream in Figure 4 can be a stream of medium purity hydrogen obtained from an external source, or a recycle hydrogen stream from within the process. The hydrogen added to the initial feed can likewise be recycled or obtained from an external source. Hydrogen may also be supplied to the heater in combination with an oxygen feed for combustion.

Hydrogen recycle can be obtained from a stream also containing propane and propylene produced by the PSA unit in the event the adsorbent therein adsorbs carbon oxides and oxygen as described above. Hydrogen recycle can also be obtained in the same manner from the product stream of the dehydrogenator before it is introduced into the ammoxidation/oxidation reactor. It is preferred, as stated previously, to utilize a PSA system containing parallel PSA units each containing a different adsorbent and combining their effluents into a recycle stream containing the proper amount of hydrogen.

Utilizing a system as shown in Figure 3 for the production of acrylonitrile utilizing propane as the starting material, the compositions at various points in the system were determined and are presented in Table I. The compositions are expressed in mole percent based on 100 moles of acrylonitrile produced. The propane feed was virtually 100 percent propane, and the feed to the ammoxidation reactor was 32.88 percent of ammonia and 67.12 percent of pure oxygen.

In Table I, Point A is the feed into the dehydrogenator after the stream from the final stage thereof has been combined with fresh propane, Point B is the combined feed into the ammoxidation reactor, Point C is the ammoxidation reactor effluent, Point D is the quench tower gaseous effluent, Point E is the recycle stream from the PSA unit and Point F is the PSA unit waste stream.

TABLE I

Component	A	B	C	D	E	F
Propylene	15.7	20.3	7.7	15.5	24.0	3.5
Propane	75.0	21.0	19.4	38.8	61.8	8.9
Oxygen	0.1	27.2	5.0	1.0	0.2	22.5
CO	0.9	0.4	1.1	1.4	1.4	1.3
CO ₂	3.1	1.4	3.5	4.4	4.7	4.1
Acrylonitrile	-	-	9.8	-	-	-
Acrolein	-	-	0.1	-	-	-
Acetonitrile	-	-	0.1	-	-	-
HCN	-	-	1.5	-	-	-
Water	-	-	35.6	-	-	-
Ammonia	-	13.3	1.0	-	-	-
Methane	3.5	2.3	2.2	4.3	5.3	3.0
Ethane	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.9	1.1	0.6
Ethylene	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.9	1.1	0.6
Hydrogen	0.3	13.1	12.2	24.3	0.4	55.4

Again utilizing a system as shown in Figure 3 for the production of acrylonitrile with propane as a starting material, the oxygen feed to the ammoxidation reactor was changed to a mixture of equal parts of pure oxygen and air which produced oxygen-enriched air containing approximately 60 percent of oxygen. The compositions at the various points in the system were determined utilizing 100 percent air as the oxygen-containing gas and are also presented in Table II. The data expressed in Table II represents operation of the system under conditions such that 60 percent and 80 percent, respectively, of the propylene in the ammoxidation reactor is converted therein to different products, including acrylonitrile.

Table II:

60 Percent Conversion - Equal parts pure oxygen and air

Component	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>
Propylene	17.4	12.7	4.8	7.2	25.9	0.5
Propane	76.5	12.7	12.0	18.0	64.8	1.2
Oxygen	-	19.4	5.0	7.5	0.3	10.1
CO	-	-	0.5	0.8	-	1.1
CO ₂	4.3	1.2	2.8	2.4	6.4	1.0
Acrylonitrile	-	-	6.0	-	-	-
Acrolein	-	-	0.1	-	-	-
Acetonitrile	-	-	0.1	-	-	-
HCN	-	-	1.2	-	-	-
Water	-	-	23.8	-	-	-
Ammonia	-	8.7	1.0	-	-	-
Methane	-	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.1	0.8
Ethane	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.2
Ethylene	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.2
Hydrogen	0.3	8.0	7.5	11.3	0.4	15.2
Nitrogen	1.3	36.7	34.6	51.9	2.0	69.8

80 Percent Conversion - Equal parts pure oxygen and air

Component	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>
Propylene	7.4	9.8	1.9	2.8	11.7	0.2
Propane	85.1	12.8	12.1	18.4	76.2	1.2
Oxygen	-	20.2	5.0	7.6	0.3	9.8
CO	-	-	0.7	1.0	-	1.3
CO ₂	5.6	1.4	3.2	2.9	8.8	1.1
Acrylonitrile	-	-	6.0	-	-	-
Acrolein	-	-	0.1	-	-	-
Acetonitrile	-	-	0.1	-	-	-
HCN	-	-	1.3	-	-	-
Water	-	-	24.7	-	-	-
Ammonia	-	8.9	1.0	-	-	-
Methane	0.1	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.1	0.8
Ethane	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.2
Ethylene	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.2
Hydrogen	0.3	8.0	7.5	11.5	0.5	14.8
Nitrogen	1.5	38.2	35.9	54.8	2.4	70.5

60 Percent Conversion - Air

	<u>Component</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>
5	Propylene	17.1	8.4	3.2	4.2	25.0	0.3
	Propane	74.8	8.4	8.1	10.5	62.6	0.6
	Oxygen	-	14.8	5.0	6.5	0.4	7.7
	CO	-	-	0.4	0.6	-	0.7
	CO ₂	4.8	0.9	2.1	1.6	7.1	0.6
10	Acrylonitrile	-	-	3.9	-	-	-
	Acrolein	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Acetonitrile	-	-	-	-	-	-
	HCN	-	-	0.9	-	-	-
	Water	-	-	16.2	-	-	-
15	Ammonia	-	6.1	1.0	-	-	-
	Methane	-	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.4
	Ethane	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.1
	Ethylene	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.1
	Hydrogen	0.3	5.2	5.0	6.4	0.4	7.6
20	Nitrogen	3.0	55.8	53.6	69.6	4.4	82.1

80 Percent Conversion - Air

	<u>Component</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>
25	Propylene	7.3	6.5	1.3	1.6	11.3	0.1
	Propane	83.5	8.5	8.2	10.7	73.9	0.6
	Oxygen	-	15.0	5.0	6.5	0.5	7.5
	CO	-	-	0.5	0.6	-	0.7
30	CO ₂	5.5	0.9	2.2	1.7	8.5	0.6
	Acrylonitrile	-	-	4.1	-	-	-
	Acrolein	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Acetonitrile	-	-	0.1	-	-	-
	HCN	-	-	0.9	-	-	-
35	Water	-	-	16.7	-	-	-
	Ammonia	-	6.3	1.0	-	-	-
	Methane	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.4
	Ethane	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.1
	Ethylene	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.1
40	Hydrogen	0.3	5.3	5.1	6.7	0.5	7.7
	Nitrogen	3.3	57.0	54.7	71.6	5.2	82.3

45 The process of this invention is advantageous in that it is very efficient and is cost attractive in comparison to prior art processes requiring a selective oxidation unit. In addition, the process of the invention has a comparatively small incidence of build-up of any of the components of the various gaseous streams formed or separated at any stage thereof. Further, the subject process can be utilized with air or oxygen-enriched air as a feed to the ammoxidation/oxidation reactor, heretofore not feasible with a closed loop system. Unexpectedly, the subject process operates at particularly enhanced efficiency with an oxygen-enriched air feed.

50 The invention has been described with reference to preferred embodiments thereof. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that various modifications may be made from the specific details given without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

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Claims

1. A process for the production of nitriles and oxides comprising the steps of:
 - (a) forming an alkene from a gaseous alkane by passage through a catalytic dehydrogenator comprising a series of at least three discrete catalytic reactors, wherein a gaseous stream containing said alkene, hydrogen and unreacted alkane is withdrawn from a reactor intermediate the first and last of said reactors, the gaseous flow between said reactors, upto and including the reactor from which the said stream is withdrawn, is passed through a heating means to raise the temperature thereof, and the catalyst in the dehydrogenator is passed through all of said reactors, regenerated and recycled to the first reactor;
 - (b) reacting alkene in said gaseous stream with oxygen and, optionally, ammonia in the presence of a suitable catalyst to produce a gaseous effluent containing said nitrile or oxide;
 - (c) quenching said effluent in a liquid to form a liquid phase containing said nitrile or oxide and a gaseous phase;
 - (d) recovering said nitrile or oxide from the liquid phase;
 - (e) separating the gaseous phase under pressure by pressure swing adsorption and thereby forming a resulting separated stream of gas comprising unreacted alkane, alkene, and a minor amount of oxygen;
 - (f) introducing said resulting separated gaseous stream into the reactor (s) in said dehydrogenator which follow in sequence the reactor from which the product stream was withdrawn, thereby removing substantially all of the oxygen contained in said stream; and
 - (g) introducing the effluent from said last reactor into said first reactor; a reactor other than said first reactor wherein the concentration of the alkene is approximately the same as that of said effluent; or the reaction of step (b).
2. A process according to claim 1, wherein oxygen is added in step (b) as pure oxygen.
3. A process according to claim 1, wherein oxygen is added in step (b) as air or oxygen-enriched air, said resulting gas stream thereby additionally including a minor amount of nitrogen.
4. A process according to claim 3, wherein said oxygen-enriched air contains from 30 to 80% of oxygen by volume.
5. A process according to claim 4, wherein said oxygen-enriched air contains from 55 to 65% by volume of oxygen.
6. A process according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein hydrogen is removed from said gaseous stream upstream of the reaction in step (b) and the separated hydrogen is recycled to the process.
7. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 5, in which the said resulting separated stream additionally includes hydrogen.
8. A process according to claim 7, in which the resulting separated stream has hydrogen removed from it upstream of its introduction into the reactor(s) in said step (f), and at least a portion of said hydrogen is recycled to the process.
9. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 5, in which hydrogen is separated from said alkene and said unreacted alkane in said gaseous phase by said pressure swing adsorption, and hydrogen is added to the said resulting separated gaseous stream upstream of its introduction into the reactor(s) in said step (f).
10. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the said gaseous phase is divided, one part thereof being separated by pressure swing adsorption using a first adsorbent which does not separate hydrogen from said alkene and said alkane, and the other part thereof being separated in parallel to said one part by pressure swing adsorption using a second adsorbent that does separate hydrogen from said alkene and said alkane, and wherein the division of the gaseous phase is proportioned such that resulting separated gaseous streams from the parallel pressure swing adsorption steps, when combined, contain a predetermined concentration of hydrogen, and no hydrogen is subsequently added to or removed from the combined streams upstream of their introduction into said reactor (s) of said step (f).
11. A process according to claim 10, wherein said first adsorbent is 4A zeolite molecular sieve and said second adsorbent is silica gel.
12. A process according to any one of claims 3 to 5, wherein substantially all the hydrogen is removed from the said gaseous phase by pressure swing adsorption, and said resulting separated stream is combined with a hydrogen-containing stream upstream of its introduction into said reactor(s) in said step (f).
13. A process according to claim 2, in which said resulting separated stream contains substantially all of the hydrogen in said gaseous phase and is treated to remove excess hydrogen prior to introduction into said reactor(s) in step (f).

14. A process according to any one of the preceding claims, in which the dehydrogenator contains at least four discrete catalytic reactors and the stream containing said alkene, hydrogen and unreacted alkane is withdrawn from the penultimate reactor.

15. A process according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the alkane is propane, the alkene is propylene, ammonia is added in step (b), the catalyst is an ammoxidation catalyst and the nitrile produced is acrylonitrile.

16. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 14, wherein the alkane is ethane, the alkene is ethylene, the catalyst is an oxidation catalyst, and the oxide produced is ethylene oxide.

17. Apparatus having the necessary features for performing the process claimed in any one of the preceding claims.

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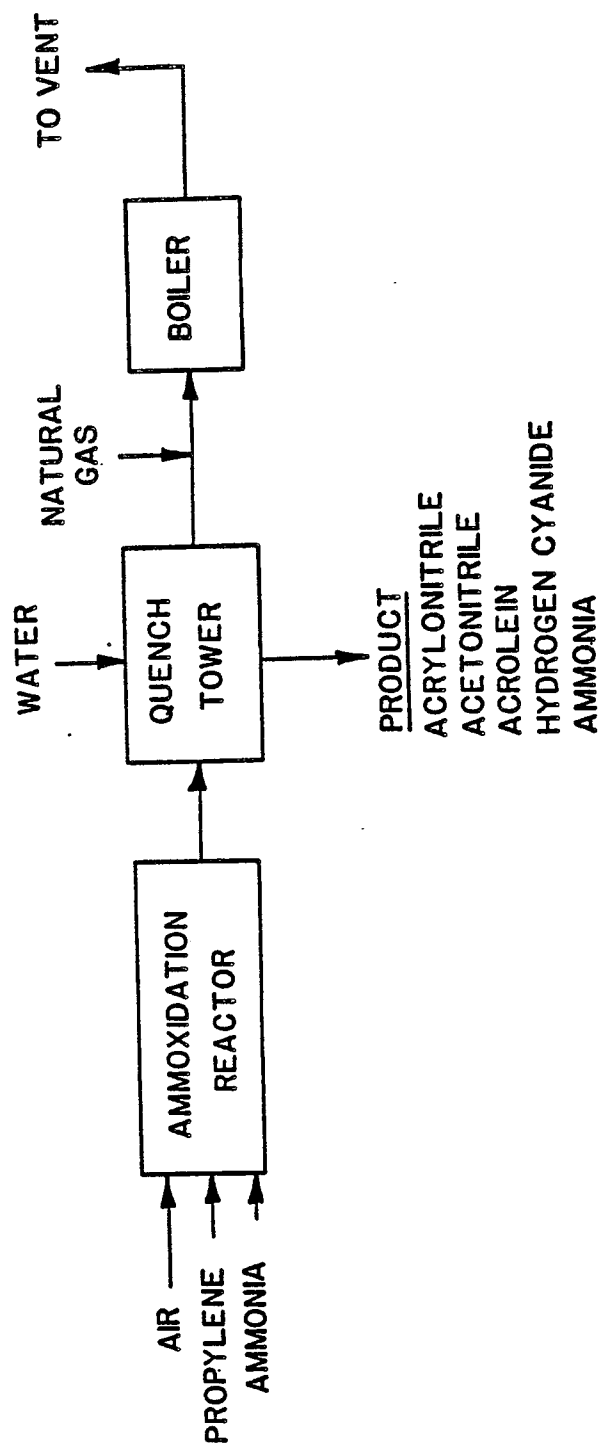
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FIG. 1

(PRIOR ART)



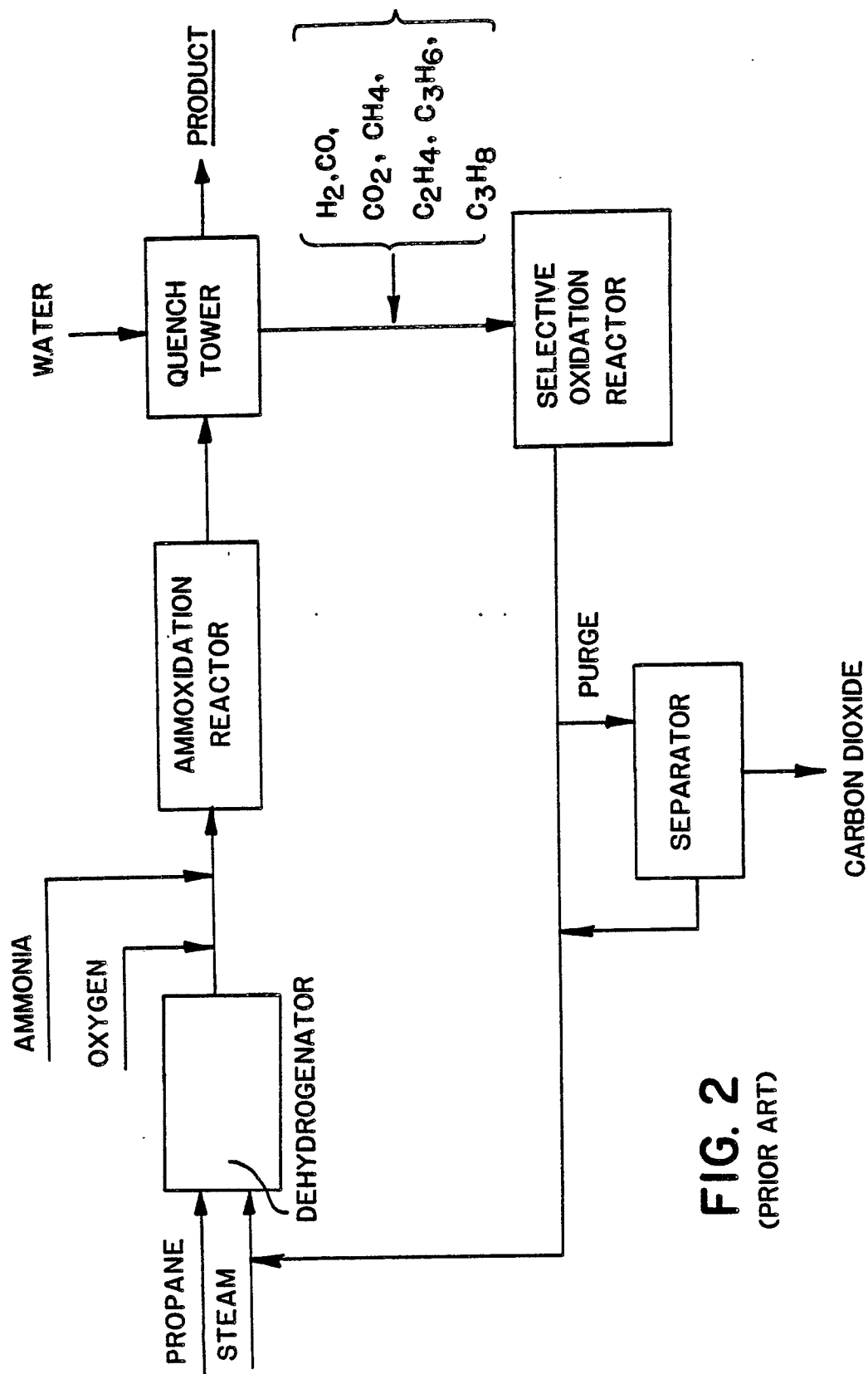
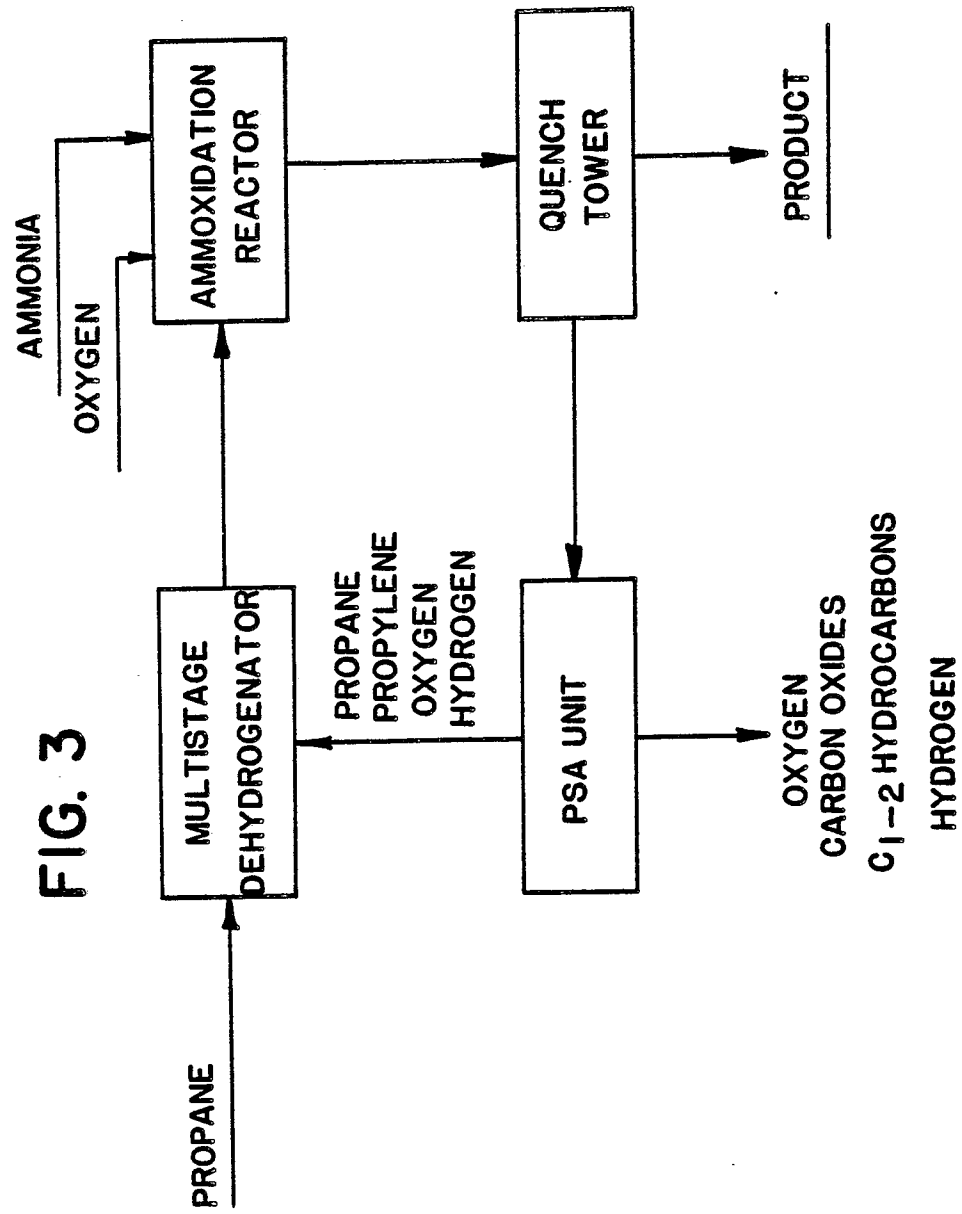
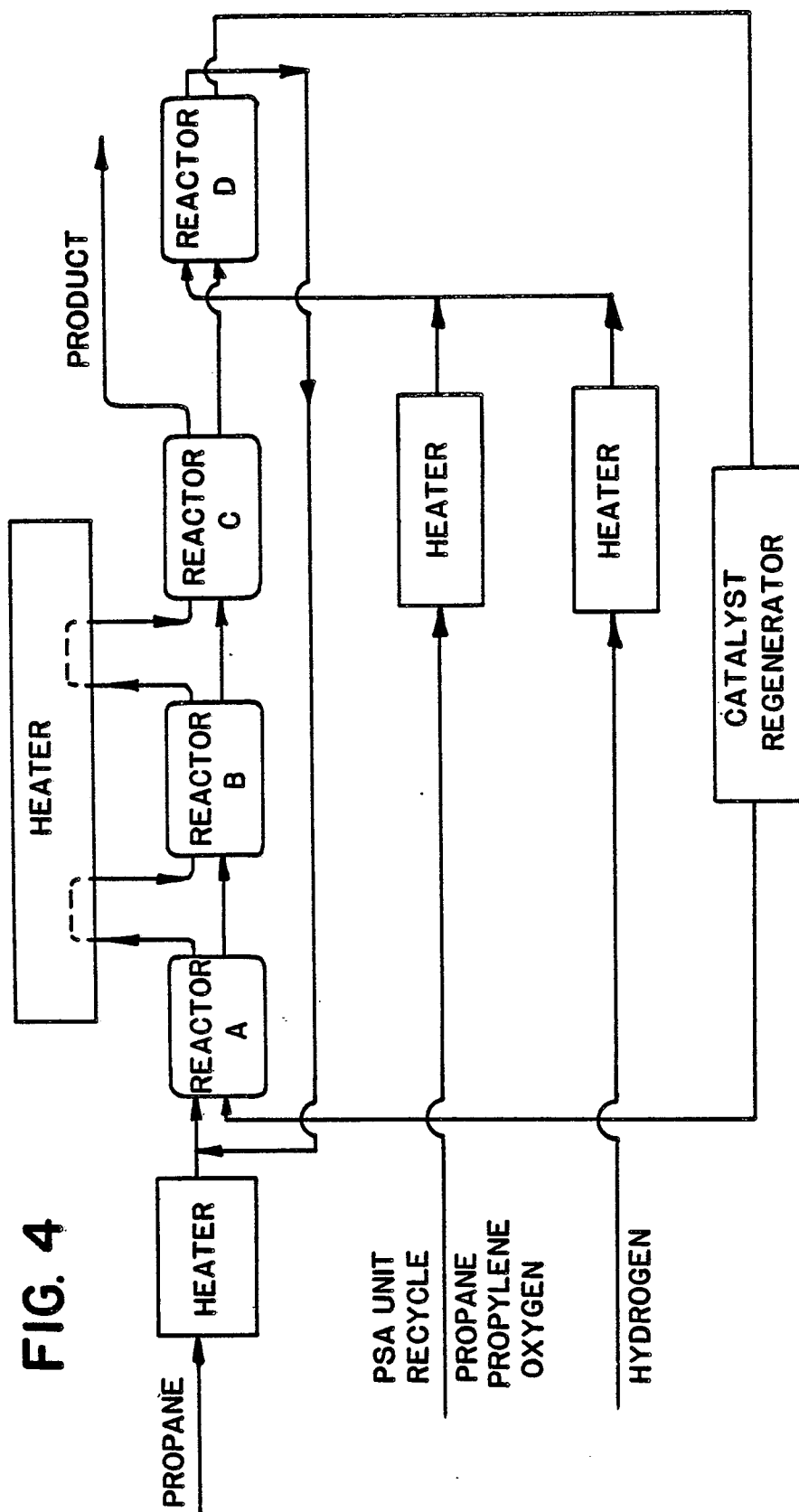


FIG. 2
(PRIOR ART)







DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			EP 89300853.2
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.4)
D,A	<u>US - A - 4 609 502</u> (S. KHOOBIAR et al.) * Claims * --	1,2, 15,17	C 07 C 121/32 C 07 C 120/14 C 07 D 301/08
P,A	<u>US - A - 4 754 049</u> (S. KHOOBIAR et al.) * Claims * --	1,2, 17	
D,A	<u>US - A - 4 335 056</u> (J.L. CALLAHAN et al.) * Examples; claims *	1	
D,A	<u>US - A - 3 591 620</u> (T. YOSHINO et al.) * Claim 1 * -----	1	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.4)
			C 07 C 120/00 C 07 C 121/00
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search VIENNA		Date of completion of the search 21-04-1989	Examiner HOFBAUER
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS			
X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	